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## 1986 COUNCIL MEETING

The 1986 meeting of OPEDA's National Council, October 5-8, focused on professionalism, recruitment, and OPEDA's organization. Council Members representing all of the 28 regions covering the 50 states and territories took part in the three days of discussion and decision-making.

In keeping with the tradition, the Council Meeting started with a reception and banquet on Sunday night in honor of the recipient of the Professional-of-the-Year Award. This year the recognition went to Robbie Robison of the Soil Conservation Service, Athens, Georgia. The business side of the meeting was opened Monday morning by President John Peterson speaking on "The Future and OPEDA." Reports from OPEDA Treasurer Harry Puffenberger (FmHA) and Executive Director John Miner reassured Council Members that OPEDA was solvent and was continuing to work toward achieving the goals of OPEDA.

Once again the speakers highlighted the meeting providing the background and information needed by the Council Members to carry out their discussions. Our first speaker was Doug Helms who was introduced as the OPEDA Historian. Doug gave a brief history of the labor/professional movement in USDA and of OPEDA. USDA Deputy Secretary Peter Myers spoke on the equal rights program in USDA and participated in an enlightening give and take discussion. USDA's Director of Office of Personnel Bill

Riley was the following speaker. He encouraged the listeners to become participants and the wide ranging discussion touched on everything from hiring to retirement.

The Council was given an insider's view of the OMB role in preparing the President's budget. Don Crabbill, OMB's Director for Natural Resources spoke on the development of the budget with a focus on agriculture and natural resources. The group raised more rhetorical questions than questions requiring answers which added some heat to the discussion. Don did more than hold his own, displaying a high degree of professionalism.

## ACTION HIGHLIGHTS

Recruitment: Council Members concentrating on recruitment came up with several ways to increase membership. The following actions were taken:

- Approved plans for a national membership campaign beginning in March, and ending in June, 1987. Incentive awards will be provided.
- Test the feasibility of offering a three-months trial membership to first-time members. (This test is already underway.)
- Agreed not to increase either annual dues or adjust Life membership dues in 1987. (The idea is to increase membership to add to OPEDA's resources rather than to increase dues.)

-Provide one year free membership for anyone recruiting five members in one year. The determination would be made at the end of the year and checks in the amount of a year's dues would be sent to the eligible recruiters.

Legislation: Council members reviewed the progress made by OPEDA to better focus on influencing decision makers. This included the use of the Legislative Network (300 members), the OPEDA Alert (a special legislative information paper going to network members) and the lobbying activities in Washington. Other suggested actions included:

-Develop a method to enable OPEDA Headquarters to determine how many members of the legislative network have made congressional contacts.

-Notify Chapter officers of dates of Congressional field work recesses and otherwise encourage them to invite Senators and Representatives to speak at Chapter meetings.

-Evaluate the "Congressional Voting Record" that was included in the October OPEDA News, and determine its value and how it might be improved.

Professionalism: In order to strengthen professionalism among members and to support USDA's efforts to increase productivity, it was agreed that a number of actions need to be taken.

-Place emphasis on the need that training continue in the face of budget cuts. Do this by supporting efforts to provide training programs and making them available to all USDAers.

-Career development will be encouraged by OPEDA's support of USDA career development programs and encouraging those agencies that don't have such a system to adopt one. Included in this encouragement will be efforts to reduce the financial cost to the employee in following the USDA career track. Such things as equitable relocation reimbursements, support to participants furthering their education and full use of the opportunities made available in the Civil Service Reform Act will be supported.

-Encourage expansion of the Award and Recognition programs of OPEDA, USDA and others. This expansion would call for an increase in awards to field headquartered employees, strengthening of recognition of support staff, and the including of professionalism in the criteria for selecting candidates for recognition.

-Develop an information program designed to encourage a better understanding of professionalism by USDA employees.

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## AWARDS

OPEDA presented a full complement of awards to members, chapters and friends of OPEDA for outstanding services in 1985-86. Three of the Awards recognized individuals for their professionalism, two for exceptional service to OPEDA, and two went to Chapters for service to members and recruiting.

### Professional-of-the-Year



The most prestigious award OPEDA gives is in recognition of the member who has been selected by his or her peers as an outstanding professional. OPEDA's National Professional of-the-Year Award for 1986 went to Robert (Robbie) Robison of the Soil Conservation Service. He was presented by President John Peterson with a plaque that was inscribed: "...for his contribution to professionalism. Through his competence, dedication and loyalty, he serves as a model

for USDA professionals. His contributions as an engineer, citizen, and neighbor work to strengthen the public image of Federal employees." Robbie's acceptance speech is included in this Journal.

Also recognized were Regional Professional-of-the-Year winners. Patrick A. Burke (SCS), Escondido, California was recognized "for his professional excellence in his conservation career and for exemplary service to his co-workers and the public." Joseph Rex Johnson (ARS), Amarillo, Texas was recognized "for his exemplary performance as a USDA career professional and for his lifetime efforts which have strengthened professionalism within USDA."



OPEDA's National Honor Award went to OPEDA member M. David Humphrey (SRS-Ret.) "for his leadership and accomplishments as the OPEDA Council Representative to the Texas Region, and for his professionalism which has set an example for other USDA employees." The National Honor Award goes to the OPEDA member who has made the most outstanding contribution toward carrying out the purposes of OPEDA.

Public Service Award: Congressman Frank R. Wolf (R-VA) was presented with OPEDA's National Public Service Award. The plaque presented by President Peterson was in appreciation "for his work to improve the Federal Civil Service System, and for his exceptional efforts to enhance the morale of the Federal work force." The Public Service Award is given to the member or nonmember that has been judged to have made an outstanding contribution during the past year.



Chapter Awards: The Sunflower Chapter, Kansas and the West Virginia Chapter were given awards for substantial increases in membership during the past year and for exception service to the membership. A plaque was presented to Loren Pearson, Council Representative for Kansas and Oklahoma and Sunflower Chapter President. The West Virginia plaque was presented to Council Representative Red Rowley for his presentation at a Chapter meeting.



A Certificate of Appreciation was presented to William J. Riley, Director of Office of Personnel, USDA. Mr. Riley has provided OPEDA with advice and assistance that extends beyond the requirements of his position. Through this high level of cooperation, OPEDA has been better able to service its community of OPEDA members and the USDA public.

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Organization: The Council discussion focused on how to better serve members with the present organization. The decisions included:

- In celebration of OPEDA's 60th Anniversary the 1989 Council Meeting will be open to all members.

- Continuation of OPEDA's membership and support in the FAIR coalition, the Public Employees Roundtable and the Federal Interprofessional Forum.

- A request to OPEDA's Board to study the feasibility of providing an assistant to the Executive Director.

- Continue to seek a formal Memorandum of Understanding between OPEDA and USDA.



CAN FEDERAL WORKERS EVER REGAIN THEIR PLACE IN THE SUN

(Acceptance remarks of Robert Robison, OPEDA's Professional of the Year)

I very gratefully and humbly accept this award. Never did I ever imagine I would be nominated to receive this very prestigious award. To consider that I am the "Professional-of-the-Year" for OPEDA is almost more than I can comprehend. I thank my Athens Area chapter which nominated me, the Council who voted for me, and all others who had any part in the decision. Others who played a large role include my co-workers, especially my boss Clayton Graham, and most of all my wife and family who stuck by me while building the career which resulted in this Award. I pledge to all of you that I will do my very best to live up to the dignity and honor of this moment.

Now having said my thanks, what comes next? Having been a council member for three years, I have had the opportunity to hear three very excellent presentations from my predecessors who were equally honored. I guess one of the most memorable presentations was that of Truman Ward who stood at this podium last year. Truman had an outstanding statement on professionalism.

I can't hope to reach the lofty peaks Truman claimed. However, I would like to build on Truman's discussion of professionalism and see how we can use this to help our kind regain the respect and recognition with which most of those civil servants who went before us were held. My question would be, "Can we regain our place in the Sun?"

When I was a little boy growing up on a farm in Ohio, I knew two civil servants. One was the rural mail carrier that I met at our mail box every day possible, to see what mysteries he might bring. For example, the boomerang (guaranteed to come back) requested from Jack Armstrong for a Wheaties boxtop and a quarter. Or the code breaker from Little Orphan Annie to decipher the secret messages which came over the radio each evening. Oh, I hated that Ovaltine! And I could not order the prize until it was all gone! The other was a railway postal clerk. He was more of a mystery man because he left home for several days at a time, and it took a long, long time for me to figure out the relationship between he and the rural mail carrier.

Irregardless, I knew one thing. Both were stalwarts in the community. Good God fearing citizens! They ranked up with the bankers and lawyers in the community. They had undoubtedly some of the better salaries in the community. They lived in nice homes, drove the best cars available, and in general, were highly respected citizens. As I grew up, I remember hearing my Dad say several times that he wanted my oldest brother to go into the civil service. "Get a good position." He never said that directly to me, but I noticed a smile on his face when in 1949 I told him I was going to work for USDA. It may not have been that good in your home community, but I will wager it wasn't too far off of that image.

Now, here I stand 37 years later with gray hair and a middle age spread, and have to defend why I gave my life to my government. I am called a bureaucrat. (A government official following a narrow, rigid, formal routine--according to Webster.) I am told I have many more benefits than I deserve. I am told I do not need a raise, although my fellow engineers have salaries 30 percent higher than mine, according to NSPE. (Other disciplines are in similar shape.) I hate to end my government service in this kind of atmosphere. I served in the Army in World War II. That was patriotic, they said. To me, conserving our natural resources was almost a religion. What would be more patriotic than to continue to serve my country as an engineer promoting soil and water conservation, and installing practices to protect the land

and water resources of these United States? Some place during the last forty years, the torch burned low. I still feel the religious fervor, but the public for whom I work somehow lost theirs. They aren't so sure I'm necessary. They also question you and most other civil servants.

We could talk for hours about how we got into this situation. Let's bypass all that lightly and concentrate on how we can get out. However, we have to be realistic. It won't come overnight. It didn't happen suddenly, and it won't go away quickly. But let us all work together and establish the beach head which will win the battle for us. But where? What is the key? Is there fault? If so, who or what? If those who are concerned are realistic, they realize that there are plenty of issues to go around. The OPEDA Council will try to attack a few of them this week.

Civil servants, unfortunately, are not blameless. We've all heard horror stories about how civil servants have treated members of their publics. One recent story I heard involved contracts. The private contractor submitted a proposal. The civil servants reviewing the proposal would only review until they found an error. The proposal was returned for correction with caustic remarks. When returned with the correction, they would continue to the next error. So far, the proposal has been returned five times. No wonder the private contractor was extremely frustrated. This is just one example. I'm sure all of you have heard of similar experiences.

Civil servants have many examples of shoddy treatment by their employer (their government). This ranges from refusal to adjust salaries to those of similar jobs in private industry, to downgrading by their publics and politicians, to a continual eroding of benefits, such as retirement.

The Federal Interprofessional Forum (FIF) made what I believe is a very excellent appraisal of what government needs to do to help its employees regain their self respect. It's partly money, but it includes many other things even more important. FIF has four proposals. The first three I would like to present. 1. Rebuild the esprit de corps. (a) Acknowledge that patriotism is a key motivator for most professional career civilians. Reflect this by employing more inspiring terms such as "service of the U.S.," "Federal service," "national service," or "service in the public interest." (b) Establish means for performance motivation and recognition that are suitable for professionals including recognition of individual and group achievements, sacrifices, and exceptional contributions. (c) Create public awareness of the role and activities of the career professionals. Cease denigrating them in public and criticizing their duties, especially those duties that are distasteful to scofflaws or irritating to other citizens. (d) Eliminate personal financial liability for line-of-duty performance.

2. Increase the efficiency of the government. (a) Reaffirm the merit principle for hiring, paying, developing, promoting, retaining, disciplining, and retiring people on the basis of ability and performance. (b) Strive toward a superior career professional service that will be capable of greater productivity and competent to operate the government more economically. Attract and retain high quality conscientious employees through fair and equitable treatment and through a compensation system that is truly comparable to the better part of the private sector; including pay, retirement, health and fringe benefits. (c) Economize by cuts in selected delays, "bulge" studies, fiddling with annuities, and similar debilitating programs. Recognize that Federal pay levels pursue but never catch up with private enterprise counterparts. Eliminate programs having the obvious intent of securing additional Federal income revenues by withholding compensation from employees, a form of special-class taxation.



3. Strengthen the management of the Executive Branch. (a) Foster a cooperative environment wherein career professionals can work effectively and harmoniously with the elected and appointed officials. Encourage trust and faith between career professionals and the new officials by honoring commitments and adhering to facts in all public statements. (b) Improve management education and training by establishing orientation programs for new officials so that they can better understand government functions, programs, and projects and for career executives so that they can better appreciate new policies and programs. Continue and improve the important prevailing management education and training for the career professionals. (c) Increase the effectiveness of individual professionals by improving the position description and classification provisions and by instituting simpler but superior performance evaluation arrangements. (d) Improve management control of government operations by increasing the number of knowledgeable and skilled inspectors independent of the local chain of command; and by providing forums which can cope with both the benefits of dedicated dissent, the problems of capricious complaint, and the welfare of dissenters. (e) Define the respective roles of the political officials and career professionals; and distinguish between career duties and contractor activities.

FIF describes civil servants as navigators of the Ship of State. Our ship of state is owned by the citizens. The owners' representatives are the elected and appointed officials of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. They set the policy. These policies are implemented by the rest of the Federal System, which is under the ship's navigators, the career professionals, civilian and officer, employed by the Federal government. Career professionals administer the system, plot the course, and operate the ship on her policy missions. "All of those in the service of the U.S. must have the wisdom, knowledge, integrity, stability, and strength of purpose to accomodate their duties and keep the U.S. safe, free, and on course."

The President of the U.S. is the key person on starting to build pride in performance, esprit de corps, and encouraging the general public to recognize and appreciate the value of a strong, dedicated civil service. If the President promotes this attitude, others in leadership positions and the public will assume the same posture. For at least twenty years, this has not been the posture of our Presidents and other political leaders. They must turn this around and again place the civil service on a high plain of potential careers for young Americans.

Today, it is difficult for some of us to promote a Federal career for bright young professionals about to seek their first position in the real world. However, we must think again! We have the best system of government in the world. To maintain this system and keep it operating smoothly, we have to have the best brains and the most dedicated professional young people available. We can't afford to lose all of them to private enterprise. If we do, all of us, civil servants and private enterprise, will suffer irreparable damage. We must have them to continue our professional workforce. Is it wrong to argue good old love of country and patriotism? I believe everyone of us here has that feeling of love of country--a lump in the throat when the flag goes by! Our young people are having a rebirth of this feeling. We need them in Government! Use patriotism as a strong argument for public service.

The other group which must take an active part in reinstating the navigators to their rightful position in the crew of this ship of state is Congress.

Civil servants have many friends in the House and Senate, but many legislators have adopted the views of the public and do not delve deeper to ferret out the true facts. Congress by its actions often frustrates the civil servant by procrastination on funding legislation. Threats of change and changes in personnel policies ensure feelings of instability in employees. Retroactive actions make employees unsure of where they stand. Congress has the responsibility and opportunity to ensure the U.S. has a capable, well trained, dedicated workforce. The sooner they assert their dedication to a top notch civil service, the sooner our ship of state will move forward on course at full speed.

Now, let's turn the mirror around and look at ourselves. We have a job to do also. We have to resell ourselves to the American public. To paraphrase a well known statement by a house of financial counselors, you can't buy public respect--you earn it! And we need to start today.

Serve the public you are responsible to, but stay within the law and policy. There is a very fine line between being a bureaucrat and serving the public purposes. In the Soil Conservation Service, we are encouraged to consider all the alternatives, present the feasible alternatives, and try to help the recipient make a decision. Perhaps if we in SSC did a better job practicing what we are taught, and all civil servants assumed this type of helpful attitude, we would all be better accepted by the public we serve.

I am not only a farm boy, a veteran, an engineer, a civil servant, a Methodist, but also a Rotarian. Rotary has many good things about it; one of them being its Four-Way Test. Good Rotarians believe in living up to its tenets. They believe if you ask these questions of any action you take and get a positive response, it will be a good action. The questions in the Four-Way Test are: (1) Is it the truth? (2) Is it fair to all concerned? (3) Will it build good will and better friendships? (4) Will it be beneficial to all concerned? I believe you will agree it's not a bad set of questions for civil servants to test their actions.

However, perhaps we should develop our own five-way test for civil servants using our own OPEDA acronym. OPEDA's purpose states that it is dedicated to promoting the improvement of employee performance, status, and conditions of employment. This fits well into the goal of regaining status among our many publics. Let's call it the Five-Way Test for a professional employee of USDA. Obligate myself to total public service; Professionalism in my job at all times; Expedite my work within reasonable standards of health, safety and, accuracy; Demand an earned respect from all publics; Always be honest, sincere, and display integrity.

Can civil servants regain their place in the sun? You bet! If each of us knows the job, displays integrity, dedication, enthusiasm, ingenuity, objectivity, courage, and humility, we are on our way. Add to this total support of and to a professional organization such as OPEDA, and we have it won. Oh, don't be impatient; it will take time. It won't happen during my career which is drawing to a close. But it may happen during yours if we remember who we are, true professionals, and act in this manner!

Thanks again for the great honor you have accorded me. I shall always try to live up to the trust you have placed in me and always try to display a true sense of professionalism.